

Teens Tend To Neglect Their Mouths

By Delta Dental of New Jersey

Image is everything to today's teens. The right look includes the newest, trendiest clothes and a Hollywood smile to match. However, just as these young adults dread doing laundry and ironing their clothes, the same can be said about maintaining good oral health. Teeth whitening and straight teeth are top concerns to teens, yet their poor oral health care can prevent these desired results, according to an online membership poll conducted by the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD).

One hundred thirty general dentists took part in an online poll about adolescent oral health on the Academy's website (<http://www.agd.org/>).

Adolescent patients are increasingly interested in obtaining a beautiful smile, yet their poor oral hygiene habits and nutrition often hinders a healthy smile.

Eighty-one percent of dentists polled cited cavities as the most treated adolescent problem, which was the largest response of the survey. Cavities, an infectious disease caused by acid-forming bacteria found in dental plaque, destroys the tooth's structure. Tooth decay occurs when teeth are frequently exposed to foods containing carbohydrates (starches and sugars) like soda pop, candy, ice cream, and cake.

Teens care about the appearance of their smiles. When visiting the dentist, teens' primary concerns are straight teeth (52 percent) and whitening is the second most popular concern (34 percent).

When asked what is the top contributor to teens' poor oral health 56 percent of AGD dentists believe improper hygiene and habits and 31 percent of AGD dentists believe poor eating habits contribute to poor oral hygiene.

Despite the fact adolescents may not always eat a well-balanced diet or take proper care of their teeth, they do manage to visit the dentist twice a year for check-ups according to 62 percent of AGD dentists.

Young adults can take these steps to improve oral hygiene:

- Drink bottled tap that contains fluoride water instead of soda. Doing so strengthens teeth, prevents dehydration and cleans excess bacteria in mouth.
- Turn the radio on while brushing teeth. On average, young people only brush an average of two minutes per day. Brushing teeth for the length of one song, three times a day ensures that proper brushing time is achieved with noticeable results.
- Avoid sugary snacks with bite-sized fruit or vegetables. Prevent cavities by steering clear of candy bars and other convenience snacks. Opt for natural foods to prevent cavities.

Consult with your dentist before trying over the counter teeth whitening systems. Although inexpensive whitening kits are available in stores, the AGD recommends that teens (and adults) share concerns and questions with their dentist before using. The ingredients used may be stronger than the average consumer thinks and lead to gum recession and sensitivity.